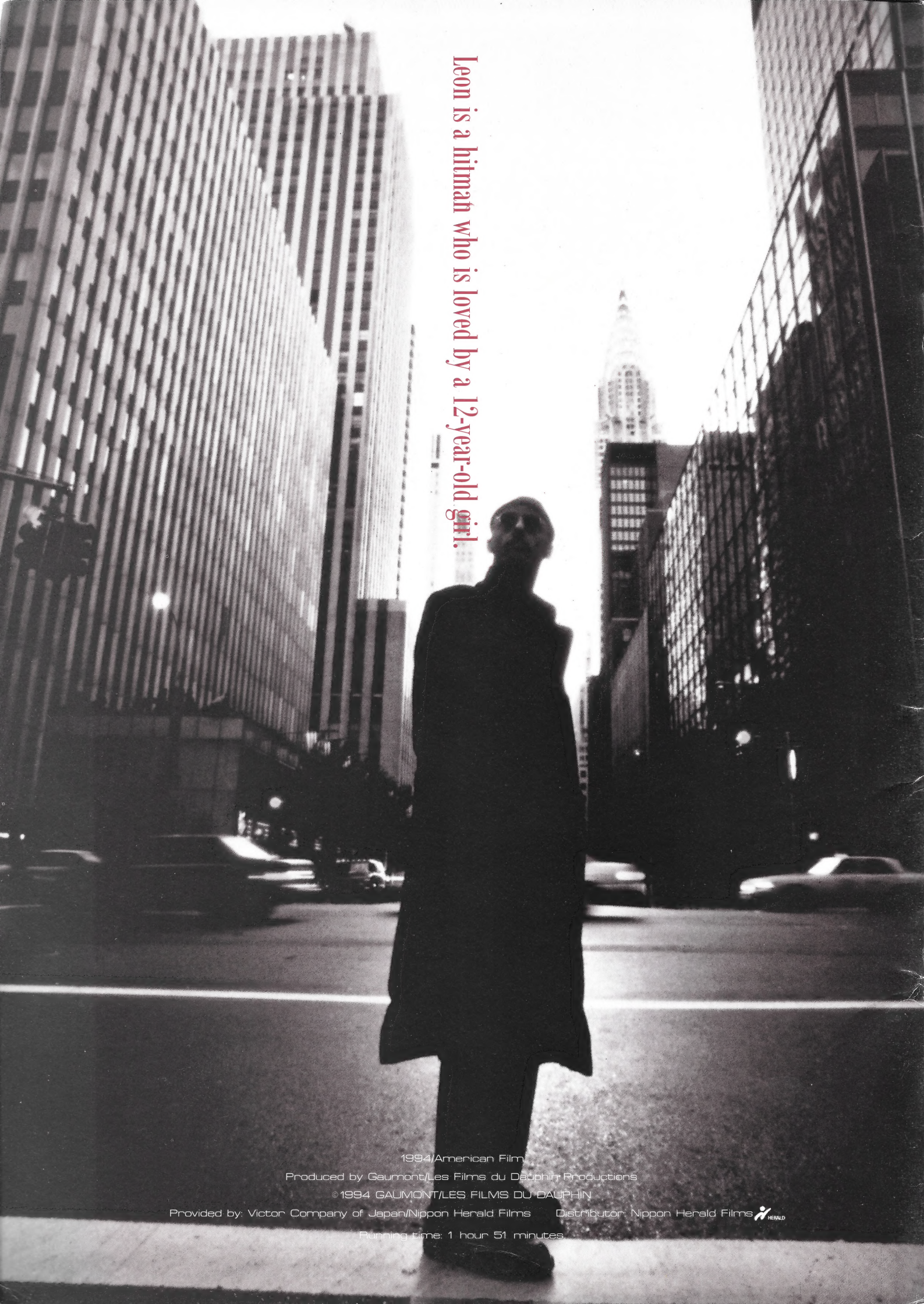
A LUC BESSON FILM

LEON

JEAN RENO GARY OLDMAN NATALIE PORTMAN DANNY AIELLO



Leon is a hitman who is loved by a 12-year-old girl.

1994/American Film
Produced by Gaumont/Les Films du Dauphin Productions
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Provided by: Victor Company of Japan/Nippon Herald Films Distributor: Nippon Herald Films
Running time: 1 hour 51 minutes

A LUC BESSON FILM

LEON

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レオン

Fierce Pure Love.

LEON

INTRODUCTION

Luc Besson, director of "The Big Blue" and "Nikita," who captured the hearts of many people, has completed his long-awaited latest work, "Léon."

Léon is a New York City hitman who carries out his job perfectly. He shuns all emotions, never misses two cartons of milk a day and his training, his only joy being watering a potted houseplant that, like him, never takes root, and he adheres to the rule of "never killing women or children." A 12-year-old girl named Mathilda, whose family has been massacred by a corrupt police officer, comes to this taciturn man seeking help. The girl vows revenge, and Leon tries to protect her. When the tenderness and compassion of a father and daughter turns into passionate love, a fateful battle awaits the two...

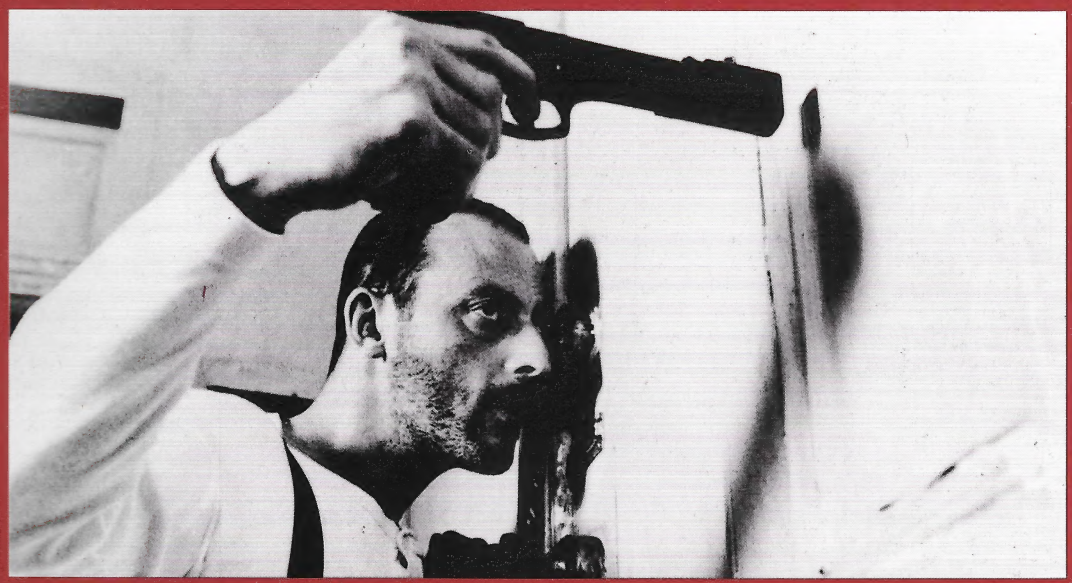
Set in New York, this film depicts the awkward yet pure love between a man who knows nothing but fighting and a girl who is like a daughter to him, while weaving in powerful action scenes. It is Besson's masterpiece, depicting ``brutal pure love.''

Besson himself wrote this film for Jean Reno after falling in love with his role as the cleaner Victor in "Nikita." With perfect casting and the collaboration of Eric Serra's music, which is an essential part of Besson's work, he has succeeded brilliantly in creating a visual world that is uniquely Besson's on the screen.

This film also marked Besson's debut in worldwide production, and its strong showing in the US on November 18th attracted much attention. It was also released in France on September 14th, where it was a huge hit with astonishing numbers compared to Besson's previous works, and received enthusiastic support.

The protagonist, Léon, is played by Jean Reno, a distinctive actor who has always played important roles in Besson's films and left a strong impression, while Natalie Portman was chosen to play his love interest, Mathilda, after an audition of over 2,000 people, to the point that Besson said she was the only one for the role. The ruthless corrupt police officer is played by the genius Gary Oldman, and Danny Aiello plays Tony, a man with connections to the underworld of New York.

Filming began on June 1, 1993, with exterior scenes shot on location in New York, and interior scenes shot in Paris until October 7, 1993.



STORY

Léon (Jean Reno) has been asked to take on a new job at an old restaurant in Little Italy, New York. The owner, Tony (Danny Aiello), has been nurturing Léon since he was a child, turning him into the perfect assassin. Léon carries out his job reliably and ruthlessly. That day, he massacred several henchmen and cornered a mafia boss. His daily routine consists of two cartons of milk and training. His only joy is watering the potted plants in his cheap apartment, which, like him, have no roots.

Mathilda (Natalie Portman), a 12-year-old girl who lives in the room next door to Léon, is also a lonely girl. Ostracized by her family, this cigarette-smoking girl has a constant stream of open wounds. That day, Mathilda is waiting in the hallway for a fight between her father and a stranger to end. The customer, Stanfield (Gary Oldman) and his men, tell her that Mathilda's father has stolen their heroin and tell her to find the missing supply by noon the next day before leaving.

The next day, while Mathilda was out shopping, Stanfield returned to the apartment with a machine gun. The price of betrayal was death. He slaughtered the family, including Mathilda's four-year-old brother, screaming hysterically. Mathilda, who had just returned home, passed by Léon's room, holding back tears, and rang the doorbell.

Confused by the sudden visitor, Léon is asked by Mathilda to hide her for a while. When she finds out that he is a hitman, she begs him to become one too, so that she can take revenge on the man who killed her beloved brother. At first, Léon refuses, but is unable to kill or drive away the girl who has discovered his secret, and so they begin living together in a strange relationship.

The two move into a cheap hotel and begin to open the heavily closed doors of their hearts to each other. Léon teaches the girl his killing techniques and theory - "Don't kill women and children" - and the girl teaches Léon how to read and write. Mathilda, who grew up in adversity, and Léon, who has only ever known fighting, begin to develop new feelings between them that are neither father-daughter nor lover. When Léon tells Tony that for the first time he has felt the desire to do something for someone, Tony senses a dangerous future.

One day, Mathilda accidentally discovers Stanfield's true identity: he's a corrupt DEA agent. When Léon returns home injured from work, Mathilda is overcome with clumsy compassion, and resolves to exact revenge. She stalks Stanfield while Léon is out, but ends up being apprehended instead. Léon rushes to her aid, but this only ignites Stanfield's relentless rage. After discovering Léon's location through Tony, Stanfield sets out with hundreds of police officers. In a cramped hotel room completely surrounded, the final battle between Léon and Mathilda is about to begin...

Of Iron I

●Yoji Arakawa

I have never seen reality. Because I am fresh milk. Because I am a potted plant. Because I am a hallway. It is not an attack. It is simply an appearance, carrying an object. Just like a bullet carries the wind. The world was once reality, fresh milk. It was a potted plant. It was in water that reflected the blue sky. So clean you want to rub your eyes. A disheveled yet refreshing opinion about Beethoven. High on drugs, the opinion is always vivid. Someone once loved music more than life itself. Is that wrong? No, this is not an attack either. It is a hallway. Just a hallway. Choosing a place where the wall does not touch, the voices of people consulting within the building pass through.

Of Iron II

Silently, milk and potted plants are brought in. It's neither enough nor enjoyable. It's the appearance of a fact that turns back and forth between good and bad. The hallway runs. A cold wind blows, and I'm squeezed by the wall of love that has failed to grasp humanity and can no longer be controlled. Gulp, as two packs of iron pass through the cliff of my throat, the balance between someone and me overflows like a dream. So that someone can enjoy me. Until life forgets where it is. Have you read the newspaper? Did you know that reality was born again around Tuesday? I don't know. Because I look asleep, leaning back in my chair. What a form you take, remaining so silent.

LEON

JEAN RENO
as LEON
レオン：ジャン・レノ

He loves to travel and was attracted by the opportunity to live and work in New York with his longtime friend Besson, so he accepted the offer. Since "The Last Battle" (1983), he has shown his unique presence in Besson's films, including "Subway" (1984), "The Great Blue" (1988), and "Nikita" (1990). He gained instant popularity in Japan for his role as Enzo in "The Great Blue" (nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the César Awards), but he also established himself as an undisputed superstar in his home country with the explosive success of "The Visitors" (1992).

Born in Casablanca, Morocco in 1948 to Spanish parents, he enrolled in a government-sponsored drama school after graduating from high school, and began studying at the renowned Cours Rene Simon in Paris in 1970. After attending a workshop at the Actors Studio run by Andreas Voutsinas in 1974, he landed a role in a TV show, and began his career on both TV and stage.

"Luc Besson has a lot of trust in him, saying, 'No matter when, always, he writes and shoots with action, emotion and love.'" This film marks the first American film for both Reno and the director. Reno's next projects include Bernard Nouer's "On the Road Again" and Lawrence Kasdan's "Paris Match."

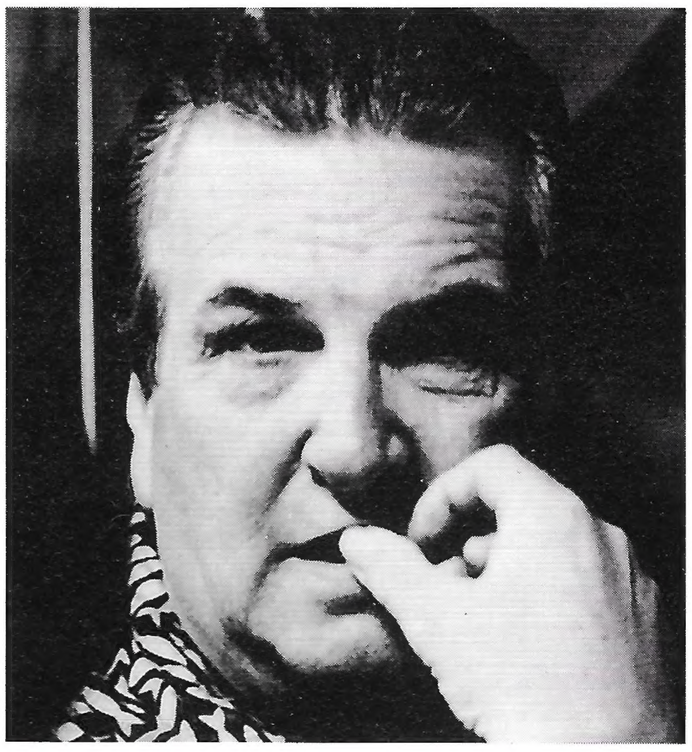
NATALIE PORTMAN
as MATILDA
マチルダ：ナタリー・ポートマン

"It was her first film appearance, and she was absolutely amazing. I explained it to her, and she listened. And she did it perfectly. And as soon as she finished, she forgot what she was doing, walked off the set and started playing like a normal 12-year-old girl. It was amazing," says director Besson, who discovered Natalie from among 2,000 candidates worldwide. She also describes the relationship between her character Mathilda and Jean Reno's character Léon as "she's an adult in a 12-year-old's body, and Léon is a 12-year-old in a 40-year-old's body," brilliantly portraying both the girlish qualities of a 12-year-old and a femininity that belies her age.

Born on June 9th, 1981, her hobbies are reading, writing, and dancing. Born in New York to a doctor father and an artist mother, she is a talented 13-year-old girl who hopes to one day study at an Ivy League school.

GARY OLDMAN
as STANFIELD
スタンフィールド：ゲイリー・オールドマン

Born in New Cross, London in 1958. After working in several jobs, he decided to pursue acting, enrolled in drama school, and made his stage debut with a local theatre company. He has attracted attention through his many stage appearances, including contemporary plays at London's Royal Court Theatre and performances with the Royal Shakespeare Company, and won the Time Act Theatre Award in 1986. In 1986, he received critical acclaim for his portrayal of rocker Sid Vicious, whose madness leads him to become addicted to drugs and sex, in Alex Cox's "Sid and Nancy." This led to him being cast by such eccentric directors as Stephen Frears' "Prick-Up" (1987) and Nicolas Roeg's "Track 29" (1989), and he lived up to the expectations, exuding a powerful presence. In 1991, he played Lee Harvey Oswald in Oliver Stone's "JFK," a global phenomenon, and the following year, in 1992, he played a love-starved vampire in Francis Ford Coppola's "Dracula." His performances, which dazzled the audience, solidified his reputation as an actor. He continued to make solid achievements with subsequent appearances in "True Romance" (1993, Tony Scott) and "Spider Woman" (1994, Peter Medak), and as a distinctive actor who can play the lead role in any style of work, he continues to receive requests from many directors. In his latest work, he plays Beethoven in "Immortal Beloved."

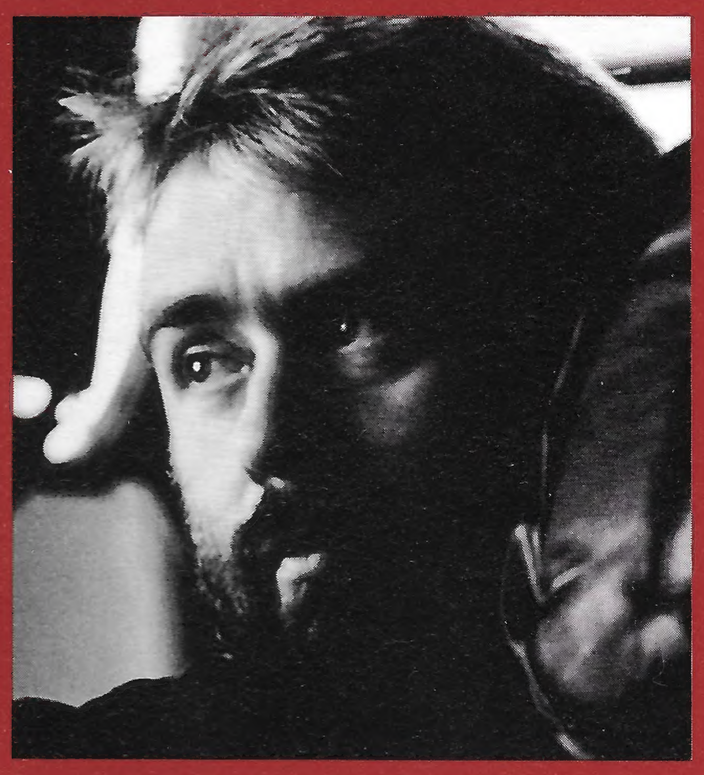


DANNY AIELLO
as TONNY
トニー:ダニー・アイエロ

Born in New York in 1933, he started out as a stuntman before moving into acting. His debut role in his mid-30s, "Lampost Reunion," immediately won him a Theatre World Award, giving his career a boost. Without any formal acting training, he appeared in numerous stage productions, winning an Obie Award for "Gemini" and an Emmy Award in 1981 for "The Floating Light Bulb." In 1973, he made his film debut in "Bang the Drum Slowly," and the following year, he was selected for the role of "The Godfather Part II" (directed by Francis Ford Coppola). In the 1980s, he continued to appear in such acclaimed films as "Once Upon a Time in America" (1987, Sergio Leone), "The Purple Rose of Cairo" (1985), "Radio Days" (1987, both Woody Allen), and "On a Moonlit Night" (1987, Norman Jewison), becoming a valued New York-based supporting actor and working alongside renowned directors. In 1989, he received critical acclaim for his role as the Italian Sal in Spike Lee's controversial film "Do the Right Thing," for which he was nominated for both an Academy Award and a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor. He has since gone on to star alongside the likes of Robert De Niro and Richard Dreyfuss. His active involvement in charity work is also a testament to his character.

LEON

CAST STAFF



LUC BESSON
DIRECTOR & WRITER
監督・脚本:リュック・ベッソン

Having made his foray into American filmmaking with Léon, Luc Besson began exploring the idea of making his first American film when Nikita was released in the States to critical and public acclaim in 1992. The film, which incorporates the over-the-top, powerful, and fast-paced Americana elements, yet is infused with European cinematic qualities, humor, and realism, confirms that Besson is more than just a French filmmaker on his own terms.

Born in Paris on March 18, 1959, Besson dropped out of secondary school at the age of 17 and began working as a newsreel assistant at Gaumont six months later. In 1978, he moved to Hollywood to help with films. His favorite American film, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest” (1975), inspired him to pursue a career as a film director. Returning to France, Besson founded his own production company, Les Films Du Dauphin, and now writes, produces, and directs all of his films.

His debut was the short film "L'Avant Dernier," which was submitted to the Avoriaz Film Festival in 1982. This work attracted attention, and the following year, in 1983, his first feature film, "The Last Battle," won the festival's Special Jury Prize and Critics' Choice Award. His third feature film, "Subway" (1984), followed by "The Great Blue" (1988) and "Atlantis" (1991), became cult hits not only in France but also in Japan. His then-wife Anne Parillaud-starred female assassin, "Nikita" (1990), created the inimitable Besson style of action that would become the basis for "Léon," and it remains one of his most famous works.

Of Iron III

●Yoji Arakawa

Have you ever handled a machine? The closest machine to reality. I examined it. I bumped into it. I'd had enough, standing next to the barrel of a gun, and understood it all. But the place was full of corridors. Not someone else's hands. With my own cold hands, I washed my face, drank cold milk, thought for a moment like a city dweller, and then I walked quickly down the corridor, becoming a human being. All the drinkers carried their little skirts with them as they walked down the corridor. At that moment, the world appeared like a beautiful sash. I thought a little, muttered to myself that it was a little light, but I continued down the corridor, falling into the valley and the cliff. It wasn't an attack. Iron falling for someone and for me. Just a continuation of the corridor.

LEON

LUC BESSON

Luc Besson, behind those innocent eyes...

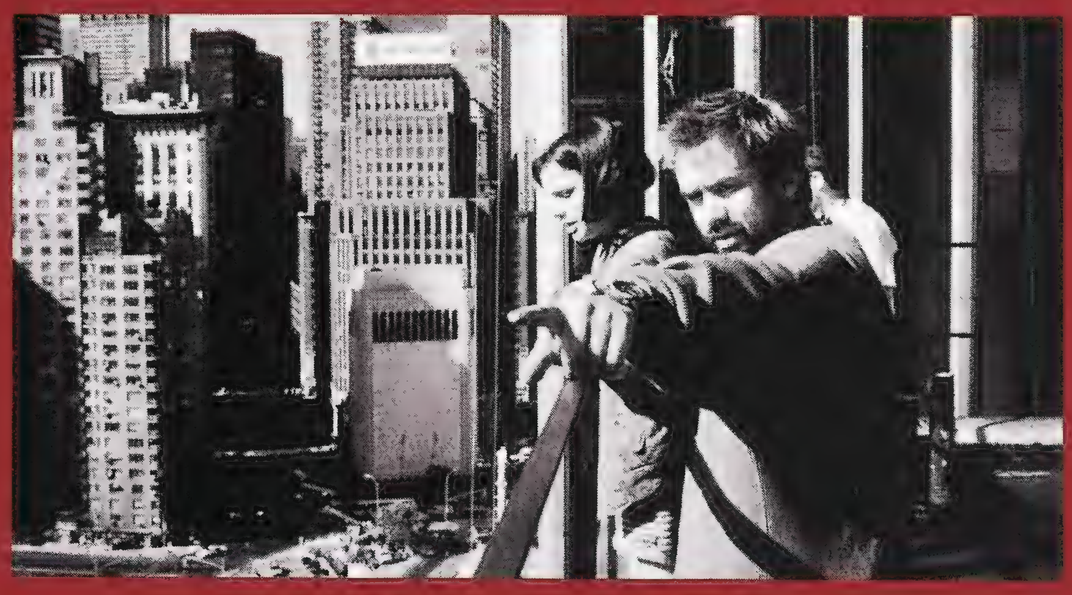
●Akiko Kawahara

Jean-Jacques Beineix and Isabelle Pasco, Leos Carax and Juliette Binoche, and Luc Besson and Anne Parillaud. These are three young French film directors who made a spectacular appearance in the 1980s, and the leading actresses who became their "muses." Most film fans now know that these three directors were romantically involved in both their filmmaking and their personal lives. Just like their great predecessors Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, and Roger Vadim, these filmmakers fell in love with actresses and, through the magic of that love, created magnificent works, living the privilege of French love.

But even so, compared to a mature professional of love like Roger Vadim, there is a difference between Beineix, Carax, and Besson, like that between an adult man and a boy. The eternal boyishness in Besson's films is especially striking, especially when compared to Beineix and Carax. While Beineix and Carax show a faint yearning for the aesthetics of love as successors to their great predecessors in the Nouvelle Vague, the love Besson depicts is unrelated to that French sensuality, and instead retains the pure, and therefore sad, flavor of first love.

Perhaps the reason Americans, and we Japanese, love Luc Besson's films is because of the innocent boyish heart he had. If Besson or Carax had been invited to America to make films, they would probably have been in direct conflict with them. However, Luc Besson, with his lovable teddy bear-like appearance and personality, easily charms Hollywood filmmakers.

Since his debut, Luc Besson has continued to portray such pure childhood dreams. The inhabitants of his films are eternal children, unable to escape reality and play in the utopian worlds they create in their own imaginations. "Subway" depicts a group of dreamy hermits living beneath the Paris Metro; "The Big Blue" depicts a young man who chooses to live with dolphins at the bottom of the ocean over a real life with his girlfriend; and "Nikita" features a "weepy assassin" heroine who is starved for love but rebels against it and lives alone. While Besson likely reflected his own alter-ego in Christopher Lambert in "Subway" and Jean-Marc Barr in "The Big Blue," it is in "Nikita" that he introduces his own "muse" for the first time. Yet, here again, the heroine is perhaps more a sexually distinct alter-ego of his own than an homage to a woman.



◆Luc Besson Filmography◆

The Last Battle (83) Starring: Jean Bouyse, Fritz Weber
His debut work was highly praised for its innovative style, which eliminated dialogue.

Subway (84) Starring: Christopher Lambert, Isabelle Adjani
A crime action film starring American and European stars

The Big Blue (88)
The Big Blue Complete Edition (88)
Starring: Rosanna Arquette, Jean-Marc Barr
A masterpiece that has gained many enthusiastic fans since it was released on video.

Nikita (90) Starring: Anne Parillaud, Jean-Hughes Anglade
He teamed up with his then partner, Parillaud, and had a huge hit.

Atlantis (91) (Sea Creatures)
Following on from "The Big Blue," this is an image film that chronicles a deep love for the sea.

The man who has acted as a father figure and older brother to these "eternal children," Besson's alter egos, is Jean Reno, who has starred in Besson's films since his debut. In "Nikita," however, the image of this adult man was actually taken on by Tcheky Karyo, who played the heroine's boss.

Luc Besson and Jean Reno. The relationship between these two men, who are like soul brothers, has always played out in his films as the protagonist living the dream of an eternal boy, and the guardian (father) of that same protagonist living the same dream. Now, for the first time, Besson has made a film starring Jean Reno. By playing the protagonist of Besson's world, has Jean Reno really transformed his role from that of Besson's guardian into that of Besson's own alter ego? In fact, he is both Yes and No. A lonely man who rejects close relationships with others and only devotees his love to houseplants, Leon is clearly an "eternal boy" like the protagonists of Besson's previous films. At the same time, however, he also serves as both a father figure and a guardian to Mathilda, a young girl starved for love but closed off to it. Here, Mathilda is, needless to say, the alter ego, or childhood, of the heroine of "Nikita."

While shifting his protagonist from hero to heroine—Christopher Lambert in "Subway," Jean-Marc Barr in "The Big Blue," Anne Parillaud in "Nikita," and Natalie Portman in "Léon"—Besson seems to always be pursuing the same person, his own alter ego, transcending gender. Both Nikita and Mathilda are undoubtedly Besson's alter egos, who have mistaken their gender. A man in love with a woman who is his alter ego is, in other words, an eternal boy who refuses to mature. And if we think back, this can also be seen faintly in the romantic orientation of Jean-Jacques Beineix and Leos Carax. Has a lonely sexuality that has lost its former "sensuality" become widespread even among French men, who are supposedly seasoned lovers?

Luc Besson's true face is that of a lovable, generous physique, but for some reason only his clear eyes always look sad. Eric Serra, who has composed all of the music for his films, has said (from the press) that he has almost no private life, and that he is a man whose private life is hidden, or perhaps it really is non-existent, but you cannot see anything outside of his work. Luc Besson is a wild, energetic, and large man who is always loved by everyone. But his true face is surely pure, and perhaps a little sad, just like his films themselves.

LEON

REQUIEM FOR PURE LOVE

● Naoki Yamaguchi

In a city overflowing with information and swirling with desires of all kinds, perhaps it is now all an illusion to live with true roots and to cultivate pure love... This is the feeling that overcomes you after watching "Léon," a film set in New York by director Luc Besson that depicts how pure love blossoms in abnormal circumstances and is at the mercy of great evil.

Léon, a skilled assassin in the New York underworld, is an Italian immigrant who seems to have become a hitman simply to survive.

He has shunned all emotion and lives quietly in a simple apartment, his only companion being a potted houseplant that, like him, is unable to take root in the earth.

Meanwhile, Mathilda, a 12-year-old girl who lives with her family in the room next to Léon's, also has no place in the family and drifts through life, wishing to be loved by someone.

The two begin living together after Mathilda's family is brutally murdered in a drug-related incident, discover the joy of living, and are bound by a pure love that transcends gender.

Director Besson subtly highlights the two's inability to put down roots in life through various images.

For example, at the beginning, Léon glides through the streets of New York and is sucked into a restaurant in Little Italy where he has been offered a job.

The camera's gaze penetrates the city, higher than human eye level but low enough as to not give the impression of floating above it. Eric Serra's melancholy soundtrack, which evokes uneasiness, is also effective.

Léon's special technique, which allows him to quickly and accurately take down his targets, is a ``hanging tactic'' reminiscent of a bat, which also gives the impression of floating.

Another impressive scene is the one that captures feet. In the scene where Léon first meets Mathilda, Mathilda's feet are thrown into space from the railing.

The film captures the character in close-up, skillfully showing his unstable, helpless mental state.

Then there's the scene where Mathilda raids a DEA investigation to get revenge on the corrupt agent Stanfield, who even killed her four-year-old brother, but ends up being captured instead, and Léon rescues her with incredible speed and embraces her for the first time. The camera clearly shows Léon's feet as he picks up Mathilda, his feet firmly on the ground. This shot powerfully conveys Léon's passionate determination to put down roots and live a life with Mathilda.

Of course, Jean Reno and Natalie Portman's performances are also superb, as they brilliantly portray the subtle changes in the couple's hearts.

Portman, in particular, has an overwhelming presence in this debut film. Despite the childishness of a 12-year-old girl, she occasionally displays expressions that suggest the scent of a mature woman, which is quite startling. Mathilda, who wears makeup and imitates Madonna and Monroe, is perceived as a woman, and Léon's reaction of looking away, unable to look her in the eye, is understandable.

However, in the scene where she breaks up with Léon, she sobs like a little child, which is endearing. The emergence of a genius girl was the biggest shock since Jodie Foster in "Taxi Driver."

Compared to Portman's vividness, Jean Reno gives off a somewhat subdued impression, but he skillfully plays the difficult role of a silent killing machine with the heart of a boy, using only his facial expressions and few lines.

Immediately after the tragedy, Mathilda, with tears in her eyes, criticizes her murdered sister as a pig who only thought about losing weight, to which he responds, "Don't speak ill of pigs," and makes her laugh with a pig potholder. In an instant, we see that he has a clumsy, pure heart.

It is also heartbreaking to see Léon's gradual awakening to human emotions and his anguish. The killing machine's calm demeanor begins to crack, and Léon, wounded from the murder, shyly presents Mathilda with a dress. His groans of pain as he removes a shard of shrapnel from his chest resonate with us as if they were real pain.

However, what really highlights the pure love between the two is the intense fearsomeness of Gary Oldman, who plays Stanfield.

In the scene where he brutally murders Mathilda's family, he chews a drug capsule (presumably a stimulant) in front of the door, twisting his back and making a gnawing sound. Then, with a look of ecstasy on his face, he tells his men he'll play some Beethoven for them, and suddenly fires his gun. Then, waving his hands as if conducting a murderous overture, he shoots the mother and daughter dead without any hesitation.

Has there ever been such a crazy villain before? It was thanks to Oldman's convincing performance that the pure love between the two characters, which is so dramatic and unique, and the fierce battle at the climax that is beyond common sense, were all accepted with a sense of realism.

By isolating himself from society and suppressing his emotions and desires, Léon has managed to retain a deep sense of purity within himself. However, when he meets Matihlda, opens his heart, and decides to break away from his old life, tragedy strikes.

When Léon opens the door to save Mathilda, the sunlight that symbolizes life and hope floods in, but Léon is shot by Stanfield and falls to the ground.

This ironic ending makes "Léon" a requiem for the rootedness and pure love that are disappearing from modern society.

At the end of the film, the camera captures Mathilda planting a potted plant, which could be considered an alter ego of Léon, in the ground. Then it rises along the large tree beside her, and eventually, it shows the skyscrapers of New York across the greenery and river. At that moment, New York feels like a "floating city," floating on the water like a weed.

JEAN RENO

PRESS CONFERENCE RECORD

● **Atsuko Kawaguchi**

In the chill of the January morning, the giant and the girl have their arms entwined, whispering something to each other and laughing innocently. The strange sight of these two, neither parent and child, nor husband and wife, nor lovers, makes you forget the cold wind biting your skin.

That warm, trusting relationship was unavoidably apparent when Jean Reno and Natalie Portman met again in Tokyo at the start of the new year. "Léon" was written by Luc Besson for his friend Reno. A lonely loner living alone in New York, his only companion being a potted houseplant, falls in love with the girl next door. She applies to become Reno's apprentice, and a love story ensues. The 12-year-old femme fatale, supported by a presence on a par with Reno's, is played by Portman, a rising star chosen from 2,000 applicants.

"Think of a herd of elephants. A mother elephant keeps her calves in the middle of the herd and moves forward. Only if they stray will she nudge them with her trunk to bring them back, but otherwise she doesn't interfere or cause any trouble. This was the stance I tried to adopt when working with Natalie. It was her first film appearance, so there were probably many difficulties. But I didn't want to be the one to barge in and scold her every time. I only needed to point out the direction she wanted to take when it was really necessary. I'm of course aware of the show business saying that you shouldn't star opposite an animal or a child, but I didn't see Natalie as a child star in the traditional sense. So there was no need to worry about her being overshadowed. She did a good job as a professional and had the aura of a star. I think we were able to build a relationship that can be described as a special friendship."

Reno's emphasis on their equal relationship also applies to the love between Léon and Portman's Mathilda. Portman, who is currently 13, describes the couple as "a 40-year-old boy and a 12-year-old woman." Her recollection, "When I was scouted at a local

NATALIE PORTMAN

pizza place, I told her I wanted to be an actress, not a model," evokes a bravery that suggests her perfect fit for the role. The girl, shunned by her family, had been naive about her loneliness even before her entire household was massacred, and she stiffens her body with all her might. When her devastated home suddenly becomes a scene of carnage, she knocks on Léon's door, screaming and crying inside. The world beyond the open door seems to offer a release from the pain of loneliness, a pain she already knows all too well, rather than the fear of living alone.

And so, without any hesitation, the girl steps into a world of equal love with Léon. To play her, Portman cut her long, curly hair into a bowl cut and plunged into the different world of acting. She declares, "Cutting my hair was no big deal."

"Changing my hairstyle made it easier for me to get into the role of Matihlda, and having a completely different appearance also made it easier for me to return to my normal self. I was able to catch up on the lessons I missed for filming with one-on-one tutoring in two days. It wasn't difficult. Even before, I often found myself bored because there was too much time left over, even during tests. This experience made me realize that school is a place where a lot of time is wasted. If I could concentrate more and finish my lessons earlier and get home earlier, I would have plenty of time to play. I would have more time to be a kid."

The girl, whose words of regret about her childhood are heartwarming, also stated, "I'm happy that by appearing in a film, I'll be able to show my children what I was like when I was 13 years old in the future. I think I was lucky that I didn't end up making my debut in a Hollywood kids' movie, because in two years I wouldn't have been able to make it as a cute child actor," and she continues to look ahead. However, director Besson says that even though she never complains in interviews, after filming she felt uncomfortable when she was given special treatment at school because she had become an actress.

"She called me once, whining a bit. But I was glad to hear that she had transferred schools and was able to return to a normal life. One of the reasons I chose her as the heroine was that even after playing such an impactful role, she had the strength to return to her own world without being affected by it. Deep inside the desire to become an actress, there is often a desire to escape from one's environment, but in Natalie's case, there was no need to worry that she would lose sight of herself."

Besson, who experienced the misfortune of being the center of attention at a young age as an enfant terrible of French cinema, is considerate towards Portman. The same loving gaze is cast upon her by Reno, who has been a regular in Besson's work since "The Last Battle." Besson's attachment to "Léon" grew so strong that he decided to not only write the script but also take the helm himself. Reno recalls the fact that Besson overturned his original idea and explored the possibility of another leading actor, calling it "the natural thing to do as a director."

"It's wrong to respect friendship to the point of ignoring doubts and doubts. That's the way my friendship with Luc is. We don't bring anything beyond that of a director and actor onto the set. It's better to maintain a sense of mystery between us than to be constantly attached as friends. If we kept saying, 'I'm thinking of doing this kind of work now, so use me,' then our friendship and our work would not work out. Of course, we are fundamentally attracted to each other and trust each other. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to stay together for months during filming, and we wouldn't be able to work together repeatedly."

"Léon" is a film that looks at the mutual need for each other without any ambition or vision for the future. It seems fair to say that the film is also about the strict yet warm feelings between people.

LEON
DIALOGUES

"A cigarette?"
"If I get caught, I'll be in big trouble and my dad will punish me."
"What's wrong""
"I fell down. Keep the cigarette a secret."

"Is it important?"
"My best friend. He's quiet, but that's good. He's rootless, just like me."
"If you plant it in the ground, it will take root. Am I your potted plant?"
"Yes."

"Maintain distance from the target. Rifles are good for beginners. As your skill improves, you can get closer to the target. Knives are a good example of this."

ERIC SERRA MUSIC

Eric Serra's film score career began when Luc Besson asked him to compose a song for his first film, "The Last Battle." He has since composed the music for all of Besson's films, with many of Serra's soundtracks achieving gold and platinum sales in France.

Born in Paris on September 9, 1959. He started playing guitar at the age of five, formed a rock band at the age of 15, and became a professional guitarist at the age of 17.

He was nominated for a César Award in 1985 for "Subway," and won the same award, Best Soundtrack, and the Grand Prize for "The Big Blue" in 1988. He won Best Soundtrack for "Nikita" in 1990, and again for "Atlantis" in 1991.

In addition to composing for films, Serra has also recorded with several of France's leading musical entertainers, including Jacques Higelin and Pierre Meige, and is currently working on his first solo album.

Eric Serra Interview
Growing a Single Seed.

The hotel is located on a street overlooking the Arc de Triomphe diagonally. Eric Serra nimbly dodges the imposing atmosphere of the lobby and appears looking like a punk kid in patched jeans and a school uniform with a stand-up collar.

"The school uniforms I bought in bulk from the uniform section of a department store in Shinjuku are well-received around the world as being elegant, but Japanese people are the only ones who make fun of them," he said, bursting into laughter at first. However, when talking about "Léon," his latest collaboration with his close friend Luc Besson, his expression straightened up.

"The music this time is a mix of various styles. There's African percussion, Arabic-style melodies, and also influences from French classical music such as Ravel and Debussy. The chaotic impression comes from the cosmopolitan city of New York. When I first saw the skyscrapers of the city where the film is set, I felt like they were the remains of a huge, cutting-edge city. What was once the most modern city in the world is now aging and decaying. That reminded me of pyramids, and that led to the Arabic-style melodies. These days, rap has become almost a cliché when it comes to New York. I knew I didn't want to do that."

While reminiscent of "Gloria," "Léon" gradually leans more towards "Nikita," in other words, a noir love story. The New York that the outsider Besson captures on screen transcends the familiar scenery, offering a strange mismatch between novelty and nostalgia. Serra's melody perfectly fulfills the director's watchful eye and makes the world perfect.

"For me, 'Léon' is above all a romantic love story. This time, I was particularly conscious of using music that would evoke emotions. Even in the action scenes, what would otherwise be mere violence becomes something completely different when the music appeals to the emotions. It's like I'm nurturing the same seeds that were planted in Luc's head," Serra explains of their collaboration, adding, "First there's Luc's world. It's music for his films." Besson and Serra, both born in 1959, met at the age of 18. Besson visited a studio to watch a recording session and noticed Serra, who played guitar, which led to the birth of their collaboration. A few weeks later, Serra appeared as bassist in a music video directed by Besson. Since this first collaboration, shot in an empty swimming pool, Serra has provided music for all of Besson's films, but he doesn't consider himself an expert on film music. He plans to sing and lead a band for his solo album, and says he wants to make performance activities the core of his career.

"I've never had a particular interest in film. I just happen to like working with filmmakers like Luc, who place a lot of importance on music. After 'Subway,' I got a bit interested and tried out other directors' films, and I realized that I wanted to work with Luc, not film music."

However, his relationship with Besson seems to be extremely cool. "He has almost no private life. I'm not sure if he hides it or if it really doesn't exist, but he doesn't show us anything other than work. Jean (Reno) and I are his best friends, so normally we'd be family friends. In fact, I meet up with Jean two or three times a week for dinner. But Luc is different. If he doesn't have work, we don't meet, and once work is over he goes home quickly. I think he's in a house with a wife and kids, not a dolphin (laughs)."

Although he is particular about his work, Serra says, "I'm not good at communication. I feel like I can convey something more clearly through music than words." This explains his bond with Besson, who has been committed to communication ever since his debut film, "The Last Battle," which eliminated dialogue. Images and music complement each other in a world that transcends words. This bond continues to blossom beautifully in his latest work.

LE

ON

PRODUCTION NOTES

A Huge Hit in the US and France!

The film opened with an unusually wide release system for a film directed by a French director. Prior to this, the film was released in France on September 14th, where it also debuted at No. 1. It premiered in 44 theaters in Paris and its suburbs (255 theaters nationwide), attracting an audience of 243,285. It was a huge hit, far surpassing the 142,681 viewers (53 theaters in Paris/380 theaters in France) of "Wolf," starring Jack Nicholson, which also debuted in second place. This means that one in three people who saw a movie in Paris during this period saw "Léon."

Incidentally, the Hollywood remake of "Nikita" as "Assassin" drew 113,900 viewers (29 theaters) in Paris during its opening week. Léon was an astounding hit, even among Besson's previous works. Gary Oldman, one of the actors, said, "Léon is a large-scale, punchy, fast-paced American film, but by adding European film elements and humor, I think it has become a wonderful, unusual work." Lead actor Jean Reno said, "Besson's way is to always write and film a script that combines emotion and love with the action. He never makes an action film for the sake of action."

Besson acknowledges that this is an action film, but says that the characters and the emotions and laughs that arise from their interactions are just as important: "In my opinion, a film without humor isn't really a film."

The Birth of the Little Great Actress Natalie Portman!

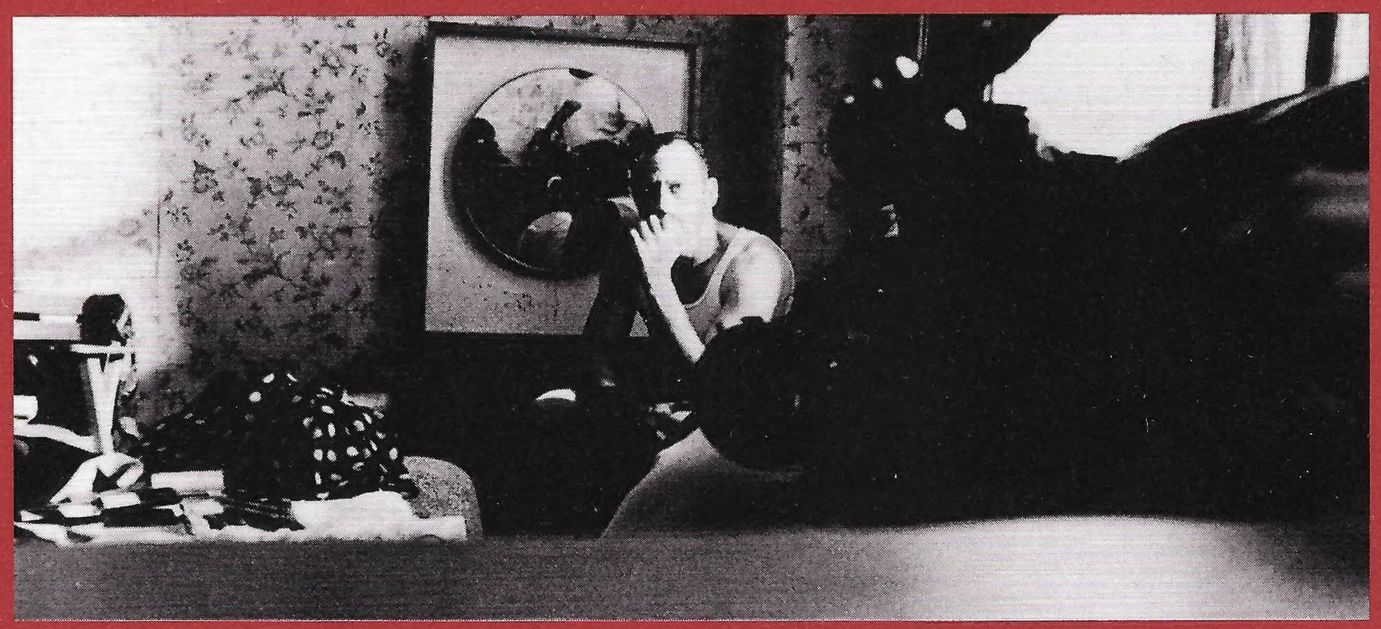
The most difficult part of casting was the role of 12-year-old Mathilda, who Besson and the casting director found after meeting with over 2,000 girls in New York, Chicago, London and Paris.

Besson says, "There were six finalists, but she was by far the best. When she arrived on set, she had long, curly brown hair. We came up with a rather Louise Brooks-esque, very dark look for Mathilda. I think her mother almost died when she saw her for the first time, but Natalie was delighted with the transformation."

Co-star Reno said of Natalie, "She's brilliant, charming, smart, talented - just perfect." Her favorite scene in the film is when Léon takes Mathilda in and starts caring for her after her family is murdered.

"It's an experience she never had with her own family, and she begins to realize she's a much better person than she was before."

Thus was born an amazing little great actress who perfectly lived up to Besson's expectations despite it being her first film appearance.



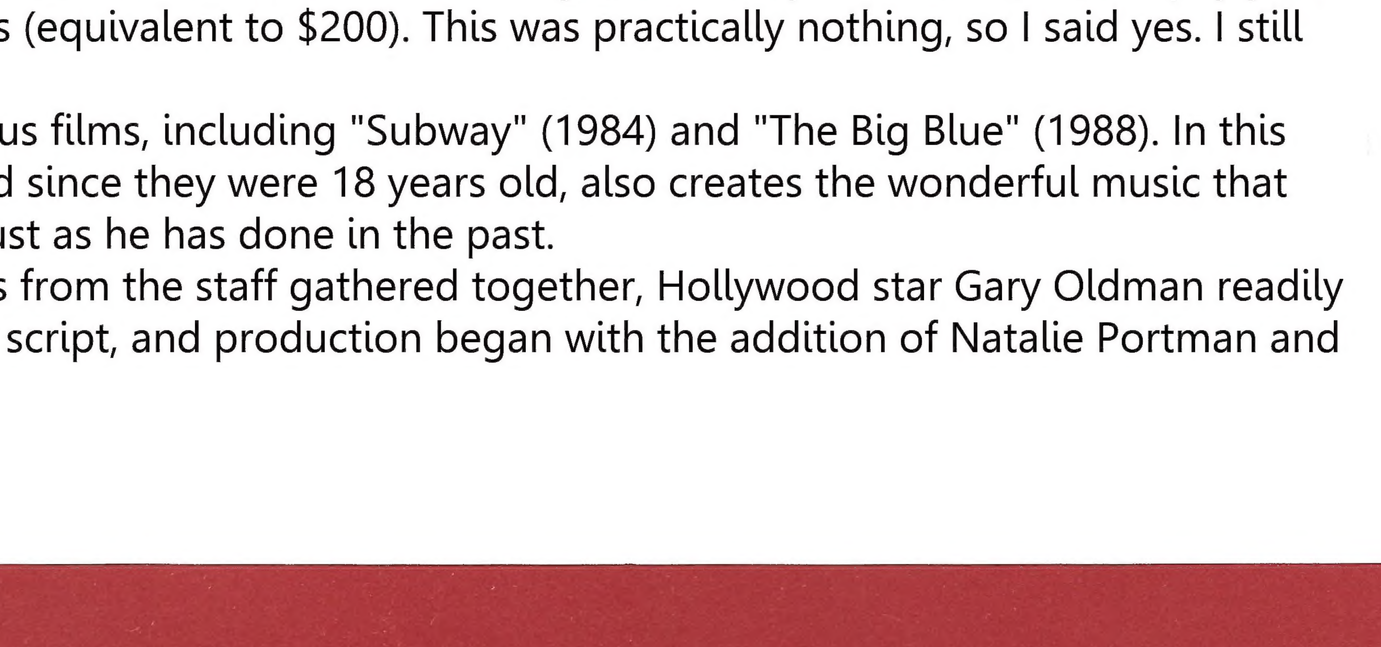
Besson Family Again

In Besson's series of films, beginning with "The Last Battle," members of the so-called Besson family have always played a part in creating Besson's world, and they once again play a major role in "Léon."

The 187cm tall Jean Reno also liked the idea of working with his old friend in New York and immediately accepted the job. Besson and Reno first met when Besson was assisting him on a short French comedy. Reno recalls, "He called me and asked me to make a short film. I don't know why, but I said yes. He said, 'I can't pay you,' so I said no. Then he offered me 1,000 francs (equivalent to $200). This was practically nothing, so I said yes. I still don't know why."

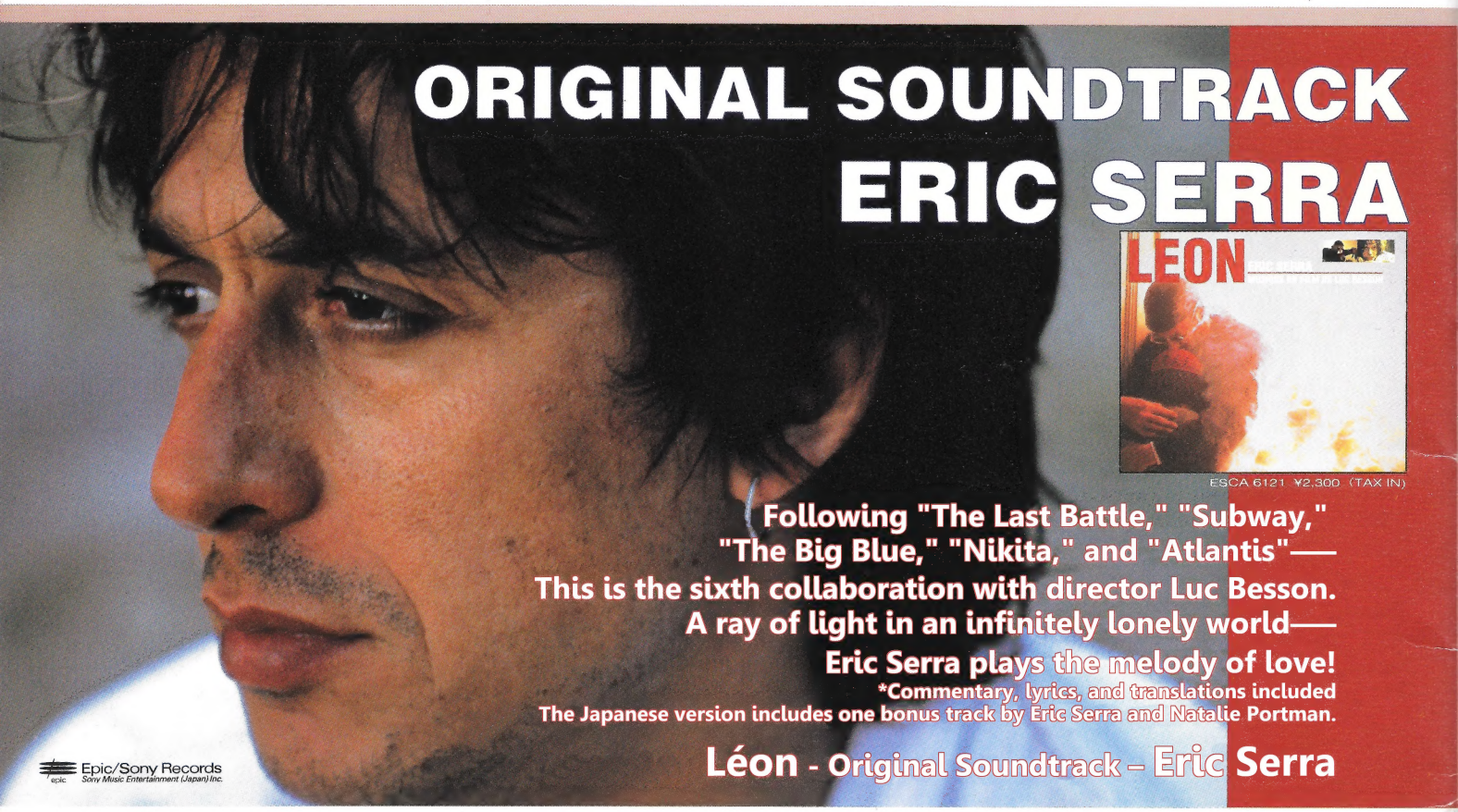
The two have since teamed up on numerous films, including "Subway" (1984) and "The Big Blue" (1988). In this film, Eric Serra, who has been Besson's friend since they were 18 years old, also creates the wonderful music that evokes emotion in Besson's action scenes, just as he has done in the past.

Furthermore, with many old acquaintances from the staff gathered together, Hollywood star Gary Oldman readily agreed to the role without even reading the script, and production began with the addition of Natalie Portman and Danny Aiello to the cast.



LEON

LEON



ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK
ERIC SERRA

ESCA 6121 ¥2,300 (TAX IN)

Following "The Last Battle," "Subway," "The Big Blue," "Nikita," and "Atlantis"—
This is the sixth collaboration with director Luc Besson.
A ray of light in an infinitely lonely world—
Eric Serra plays the melody of love!

*Commentary, lyrics, and translations included
The Japanese version includes one bonus track by Eric Serra and Natalie Portman.

Léon - Original Soundtrack – Eric Serra

Epic/Sony Records
Sony Music Entertainment (Japan) Inc.

A LUC BESSON FILM

LEON

JEAN RENO GARY OLDMAN NATALIE PORTMAN DANNY AIELLO

A GAUMONT/LES FILMS DU DAUPHIN PRODUCTION

A LUC BESSON FILM

"LEON"

JEAN RENO

GARY OLDMAN

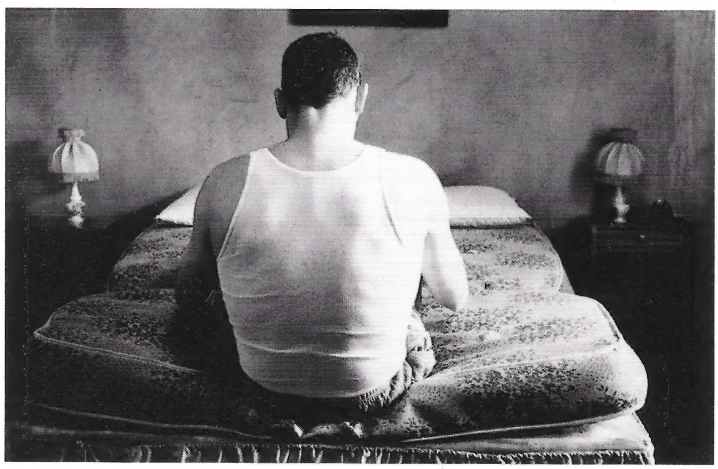
NATALIE PORTMAN

DANNY AIELLO

MUSIC BY ERIC SERRA

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK:EPIC/SONY

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY LUC BESSON



製　作
ゴーモン／レ・フィルム・デュ・ドーファン・プロダクション

出　演
ジャン・レノ
ゲイリー・オールドマン
ナタリー・ポートマン
ダニー・アイエロ

音　楽
エリック・セラ（オリジナル・サウンドトラック：エピック・ソニー）

脚本・監督
リュック・ベッソン

Novelization (Original story and screenplay: Luc Besson) Author: Toru Okayama
Released on March 4th, price 1,600円 (tax included) Published by Sony Magazines

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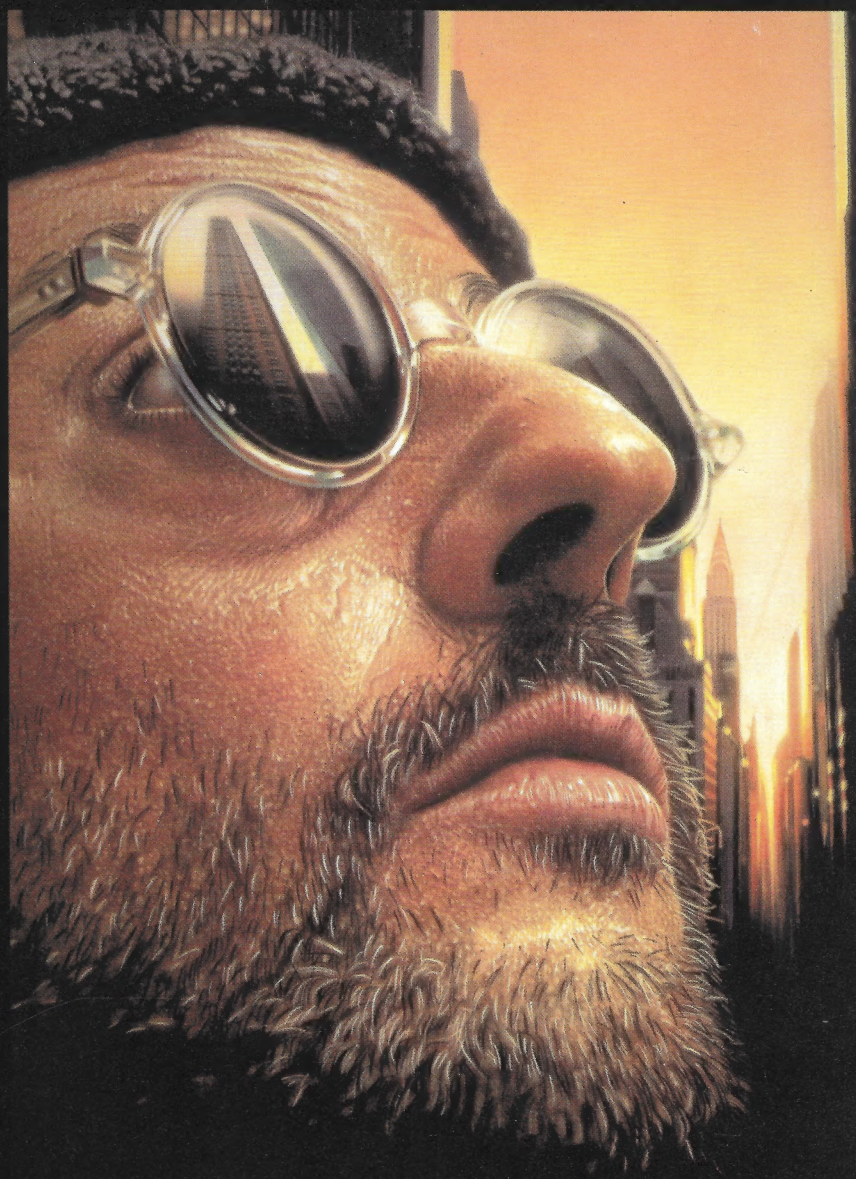
THE SHAPE OF MY HEART

by Sting & Dominic Miller



HE DEALS THE CARDS AS A MEDITATION
AND THOSE HE PLAYS NEVER SUSPECT
HE DOESN'T PLAY FOR THE MONEY HE WINS
HE DOESN'T PLAY FOR SPECT
HE DEALS THE CARDS TO FIND THE ANSWER
THE SACRED GEOMETRY OF CHANCE
THE HIDDEN LAW OF A PROB-ABLE OUTCOME
THE NUMBERS LEAD A DANCE

I KNOW THAT THE SPADES ARE SWORDS OF A SOLDIER
I KNOW THAT THE CLUBS ARE WEAPONS OF WAR
I KNOW THAT THE DIAMONDS MEAN MONEY FOR THIS ART
BUT THAT'S NOT THE SHAPE OF MY HEART

HE MAY PLAYS THE JACK OF DIAMOND
HE MAY LAY THE QUEEN OF SPADES
HE MAY CONCEAL A KING IN HIS HAND
WHILE THE MEMORY OF IT FADES

I KNOW THAT THE SPADES ARE THE SWORDS OF A SOLDIER
I KNOW THAT THE CLUBS ARE WEAPONS OF WAR
I KNOW THAT THE DIAMONDS MEAN MONEY FOR THIS ART
BUT THAT'S NOT THE SHAPE OF MY HEART

AND IF I TOLD YOU THAT I LOVED YOU
YOU'D MAYBE THINK THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG
I'M NOT A MAN OF TOO MANY FACES
THE MASK I WEAR IS ONE
THOSE WHO KNOW NOTHING
AND FIND OUT TO THEIR COST
LIKE THOSE WHO CURSE THEIR LUCK IN TOO MANY PLACES
AND THOSE WHO SMILE ARE LOST

I KNOW THAT THE SPADES ARE SWORDS OF A SOLDIER
I KNOW THAT THE CLUBS ARE WEAPONS OF WAR
I KNOW THAT THE DIAMONDS MEAN MONEY FOR THIS ART
BUT THAT'S NOT THE SHAPE OF MY HEART

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